New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 22 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 17, 1949

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"The Browning Version"

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

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"Touch and Go"

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 14, 1949

'Touch and Go' Goes Like a Firecracker

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The advent of such a satisfactory revue as "Touch and Go," and so early in the season, lends an air of solid security to the prospective year in the theater.

George Abbott's new musical is in the class where humor is more important than noise or alleged sophistication. It is energetic without being frantic, has more respect for all-around talent than starry names, and is up to the minute with its spoofing.

Although for the most part this is an ensemble show, with all the talents running neck and neck for score, it is impossible not to note the surprise and enthusiasm the premiere audience felt about Nancy Andrews. As a comedienne Miss Andrews has the inestimable virtues of range, musicality, restraint and taste. When the house broke up the show's routine to bring her back for four bows after "Miss Platt Selects Mate," it knew what it was up to.

A New Hit Tune.

There was, last night, the first of what will undoubtedly be a long series of screaming receptions for a number called unalluringly "Be a Mess," the most outrageously funny thing of its kind since the silent screen queens number in "Lend an Ear." The premise here is that old stars win new laurels in Hollywood by removing their makeup and exploiting their psychiatric deficiencies.

Although the first act has the larger share of pace and comicry, the two finales are equally memorable. The first half closes with a musical version of "Hamlet," designed in alarming and hilarious lack of awe of the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein. The show winds up with a Kazan and Tennessee Williams version of "Cinderella," which in its way is as shocking as "Streetcar" and wonderfully funny.

The sketch about movies that depends on flashbacks offers more uproarious irreverence for a rooted institution; and there are several amusing if fairly obvious conclusions drawn in a bull session at the slot machine laundromat.

Serious Moments.

"Touch and Go" is not without serious moments, and the best of them is the charming "American Primitive" inspired by Grandma Moses fame. In contrast to this gentle choreography is the frenetic pattern of Helen Tamiris' "Easy Does It." The important dance numbers in the second act, one a Mexican triangle, and the other a version of period passion, have interesting contrast, but do not benefit by proximity.

There is a charming lyric in which a boy quotes imaginary critical paeans for a young actress. This "Broadway Love Song," along with "Funny Little Old World," "Wish Me Luck" and the aforesaid "Miss Platt," all have the markings of wide popularity.

The cast at large is thoroughly pleasant, with special bows due Kyle MacDonnell, George Hall and Jonathan Lucas. The production is luxurious without being overbearing, and the colors are prime and demanding.

"TOUCH AND GO"

Revue with sketches and lyrics by Jean and Walter Kerr; music by Jay Gorney; choreography by Helen Tamiris; staging by Mr. Kerr; production designed by John Robert Lloyd; orchestration by Don Walker; musical director, Antonio Morelli; lighting by Peggy Clark; ballet music by Genevieve Pitot; presented by George Abbott at the Broadhurst Theatre, October 13, 1949. The players include: Kyle MacDonnell, Nancy Andrews, Dick Sykes, George Hall, Muriel O'Malley, Peggy Cass, Jonathan Lucas, Helen Gallagher, Pearl Lang, Daniel Nagrin, Lewis Nye, Mary Anthony, Eleanor Boleyn, Art Carroll, Lydia Fredericks, Arlyne Frank, Nat Frey, Pearl Hacker, David Lober, Ilona Murrai, Ray Page, Merritt Thompson, Carl Nicholas, Beverly Purvin, Dorothy Scott, Mara Lynn, Larry Robbins, Richard Reed, George Reich, William Sumner, Beverly Tassoni, Bobby Trelease, Parker Wilson.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 14, 1949

Musical Version of 'Hamlet' High Spot in New Revue, 'Touch and Go'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Having had some laughs—including an unexpected whoop when Cinderella flushed the toilet—I came away from the Broadhurst Theatre last evening with the pleasant feeling that I had had a good time at George Abbott's revue, "Touch and Go."

On looking over the program afterward to figure out when and where I had laughed, in order to make this report, I decided that the highlight of the show was the musical comedy version of "Hamlet," which is the first-act finale. Next, I found that I was almost always amused whenever Nancy Andrews appeared on the stage, and most particularly when she sang a song titled "Miss Platt Selects Mate."

Third item on a list which is getting pretty good now is a song, "Be a Mess," in which Olivia De Havilland, Barbara Stanwyck and Jane Wyman tell how they got Motion Picture Academy Oscars for acting in "The Snake Pit," "Sorry, Wrong Number" and "Johnny Belinda."

The List Grows.

Next, I found, I was admiring several dance numbers staged by Helen Tamiris, and such dancers as Pearl Lang and Daniel Nagrin. Then I figured it would be necessary to say something admiring about the musical arrangements by Don Walker, for they helped Jay Gorney's music more than a little bit.

"Touch and Go," like "Call Me Mister, "Make Mine Manhattan" and "Lend an Ear," is an easygoing revue to which Mr. Abbott has given the briskest supervision he has achieved in some time. It is easy-going and uneven. Some of the numbers, like "Mr. Brown, Miss Dupree," are clinkers ("Friday Dancing Class," in "Lend an Ear," being much more successful in the same genre). The lyrics, by Jean and Walter Kerr, are less original than the sketches—which are by the same people.

What I like best about "Touch and Go" is that most of the time it is topical—making fun or trying to make fun of things we know about and are interested in. That was what revues were like once upon a good old time.

The most successful topical satire is the "Hamlet" number, in which the company, aware that such lugubrious plots as "Carousel," "Allegro" and "Street Scene" have become musical comedy hits, decides to put on a bouncing wow titled "Great Dane a-Comin'." It is set to snatches of Rodgers, Weill, Porter and others, and it is grand fun to hear the King, the Queen and their courtiers sing "This Is a Real Nice Castle," or to hear Hamlet intone to Ophelia that she's a queer one.

Flushing a Princess.

The lugubrious in the drama is nicely needled in a sketch in which "Cinderella" is performed as though Elia Kazan had directed it. The old Cinderella plot is there, but somewhat mixed up with "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Death of a Salesman." When the Prince comes hunting Cinderella she is in the w. c. The wicked stepmother and the wicked sisters pretend that nobody else is home, but just then Cinderella pulls the chain and the Prince realizes she is home after all.

Miss Andrews, a graduate of the Pasadena Playhouse, is an excellent new singing comedienne. Kyle MacDonnell, the only blonde alive who can look like a blonde on television, sings prettily, dresses prettily and smiles like Channels 2, 4, 5, 7, 9 or 11. George Hall, an old "Call Me Mister" man, is frequently and amiably present.

I could wish that the Kerrs had been less obvious with the rhymes in their lyrics and Mr. Gorney less obvious with the notes that go with them. But there certainly is enough in "Touch and Go" to make you want to go.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 14, 1949

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Strictly Touch and Go

THERE is more exuberance than wit and originality in "Touch and Go." The new revue which George Abbott has installed at the Broadhurst contains several lively lampoons of Hollywood nonsense. It has swift and undulant dancing, familiar music, adequate decor and promising performers. But the gay numbers are outweighed by tedious and tasteless skits and sentimental vocal interludes which leave the show sagging when it should have been gaining momentum. At Catholic University in Washington, where it was shown under the title of "Thank You, Just Looking," it probably seemed brighter than it does when it is rubbing shoulders with "South Pacific." It should have been better written and routined for Broadway.

* * *

Jean and Walter Kerr, of the Catholic University faculty, are responsible for the sketches and lyrics, while the latter has supervised the staging. They have concocted a random topical burlesque. On one occasion they achieve high hilarity in a take-off on last year's candidates for Academy Awards called "Be a Mess," with Peggy Cass, Nancy Andrews and Kyle MacDonnell contributing very funny impersonations of Olivia de Havilland, Barbara Stanwyck and Jane Wyman. In no time at all, however, they are represented by a vulgar conception of "Hamlet" done to music. Since Jay Gorney's score is generally reminiscent, it does little to help down-hill proceedings.

* * *

"Under the Sleeping Volcano," for example, has smart dancing by Pearl Lang, Daniel Langrin and the ensemble, under Helen Tamiris's direction, but it is merely an odd production number from the bottom of the drawer. The final skit, which pretends that "Cinderella" has been staged by Elia Kazan, find most of the spoofing boomeranging badly. The lyrics are sometimes sprightly; more frequently corny. "Touch and Go" has considerable bounce. It is woefully lacking in style and continuity.

* * *

Among the players to be chiefly noted are George Hall, who is amusing in a satire of animal motion pictures and another burlesque of the cinema, "Disenchantment"; Miss Andrews and Dick Sykes. The last-named do most of the singing and handle their assignments well enough. Miss MacDonnell has grace and charm when her material permits and Jonathan Lucas takes on all sorts of roles. Abbott has found fresh and agreeable talent in transplanting "Touch and Go" from a campus to Manhattan. John Robert Lloyd has designed unpretentious settings for the pot pourri. It still remains amateurish when it is not plain dull.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 14, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

By throwing a few brains around where they are not too conspicuous, Jean and Walter Kerr have written a capital light revue, "Touch and Go," which was put on with skill and wit at the Broadhurst last evening. Being literate people who can read as well as sit down in the theatre, the Kerrs know what is going on in the manners of our time, and they say so with charm and impishness in the best stage comment on current foibles since "Lend an Ear."

Jay Gorney, one-time author at prevailing rates of "Brother, Can You Spare a Buck," has composed a cheerful score that makes everyone feel strangely pleasant. Barring a mannerism or two from the ballet of the Thirties, Helen Tamiris has composed some freshly imagined dance sequences; and John Robert Lloyd has designed the production beautifully. "Touch and Go" is good-humored, bright, original and intelligent—an excellent antidote to a long winter.

* * *

Serving as his own director, Mr. Kerr has populated his cartoon with an especially winning cast of young professionals who can dance, sing and act out a joke without feeling smug about it. Nancy Andrews is a first-rate singing mimic who does something especially notable with a wry ballad about the social mating season. Kyle Mac Donnell is radiantly beautiful, has a sense of humor and can sing remarkably well—qualities said to be common to all the women in Texas. Pearl Lang, slim and happy, is a buoyant ballerina.

For young men, there are George Hall, Dick Sykes, Ray Page, Daniel Nagrin, Jonathan Lucas and Larry Robins, all of whom are alert and comic and look as if they knew how to wash behind their ears.

* * *

Like all revues, "Touch and Go" is composed of songs, dances and sketches which, in this instance, have a uniformly skimming point of view. Count among the funniest sketches: 1, a burlesque of a motion-picture location rehearsal in which a gorilla turns out to be much brighter than the glamorous star; 2, a battle scene in which all the brass and soldiers are writing their memoirs ("The Bloody and the Sweaty" is the title of one front-line novel); 3, "Hamlet" adapted to the musical stage, after the manner of "Liliom" and "The Little Foxes." In a hilarious song, "Be a Mess," the authors and the composer draw attention to the gruesomeness of the screen characters that have recently won academy awards for some screen actresses.

* * *

A bilious theatregoer might take exception to having a blues song sung in a 1949 revue. Blues songs are most effective in eras that do not need them. And the caricature of the flashback technique in story-telling is a trifle complicated.

But the objections from this column are going to be especially mild this morning. For the Kerrs have accomplished that almost impossible feat of bringing good minds into the aqualid mart of Broadway and satirizing intelligent topics with swift dexterity and without feeling condescending about it. In speed, looks and style, "Touch and Go" is in the best professional taste, and mighty pleasant company for a friendly evening in the theatre.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 14, 1949

'Touch and Go' Just That As a Musical Revue

By ROBERT COLEMAN

George Abbott paid a visit to Catholic University in Washington, D. C., last season, and discovered an intimate revue by Jean and Walter Kerr and Jay Gorney that caught his fancy. So last evening it arrived at the Broadhurst Theatre, titled "Touch and Go." That title, incidentally, may prove a prophetic one.

We come to the regretful conclusion that it hasn't a sufficiently persuasive touch to go all the way for a touchdown. It has a few tremendously funny sketches that spurt it goal-ward, but it lacks the final wallop to score from 20 or 30 yards out. Best of the Kerr skits, we think, are "Be a Mess," hilarious satire on recent drab motion picture Academy Awards, and "Great Dane a-Comin'," a swing version of "Hamlet."

Jay Gorney, who clicked with "Meet The People," hasn't contributed any musical contenders for the Hit Parade. His tunes, while serviceable, are hardly memorable. And Helen Tamiris, who became the toast of the town for her "Inside U. S. A." dances, has failed to come up with any terpischorean novelties to match her famous "Tiger Lily."

The dancing is keyed to the modern mood. The best of the Tamiris routines is "Under the Sleeping Volcano," or artistic mayhem in Mexico. It is dramatically stepped by Pearl Lang, Daniel Nagrin, David Lober and Ilona Murrai.

Like most intimate revues, "Touch and Go" features new faces. Outstanding among them are Nancy Andrews and Dick Sykes. They work wonders with so-so material. They take such a slight skit as "This Had Better Be Love," a last-chance romance between a couple of aging people about town, and give it an effective and amusing bittersweet fillip.

Most of the Gorney woo chansons fall to the lot of versatile and attractive Kyle MacDonnell. This blonde radio queen also does exceptionally well in spoofs on dumb film stars and "Cinderella" as staged with realism and ribaldry a la Elia Kazan. Something has been added to the latter item, we suspect, since the show left Washington.

John Robert Lloyd has designed a tasteful and colorful production, which has been admirably lit by Peggy Clark. Lloyd and Miss Clark were at their best, we thought, with their simple but gorgeous framing of "Sleeping Volcano." This number is a real feast for the eyes.

Other standouts in the cast are George Hall, Jonathan Lucas, Muriel O'Malley, Art Carroll and Peggy Cass.

"Touch and Go" is so fresh, youthful and ingratiating that it is difficult for a rev ewer to say "nay" to its blandishments. But between its high spots, there are too many passages that miss rather than hit, and there's not quite enough entertainment for a completely satisfying evening. The running time is under what is usually considered par for the Broadway musical course.

Journal-American

OCTOBER 14, 1949

Rah-Rah-Rah Revue Comes to Broadway

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's nothing really wrong with "Touch and Go" at the Broadhurst. There's nothing really right with it, either. Maybe, on the campus of the Catholic University at Washington, D. C., it looked more professional than it looks on West 44th Street, Manhattan.

George Abbott, no less, is he who transplants the rah-rah-rah revue to Broadway and sets it up professionally.

Too professionally, no doubt, for its basically collegiate contents. With its amateur standing gone, with "Where's Charley?" and "South Pacific" for neighbors, "Touch and Go" seems neither professionally professional nor amateurishly amateur.

What, near Rock Creek Park, must have looked like Times Square stuff, doesn't when near Times Square.

At that, "Touch and Go" is shiny to the eye, clangorous to the ear and easy on the mind. **Suppose its songs aren't for shower-singing. Suppose its dances aren't newer than Agnes de Mille. Suppose its sketches have a way of fizzling out on you. There're those to bid it welcome.**

* * *

Neat Nose-Thumb

Take it as it comes! After the "Opening for Everybody" is a song called "This Had Better Be Love," Nancy Andrews and Dick Sykes render, as the phrase runs, it.

Then a sketch, "Gorilla Girl," a neat and nasty nose-thumb at Hollywoodian ladies.

"American Primitive," with song and dance, honors Grandma Moses. John Robert Lloyd's background is obviously Mossesian.

"Highbrow, Lowbrow" includes a middlebrow for good measure. "Disenchantment" I can't remember. Also "Easy Does It." But "Be a Mess," with Peggy Cass, Miss Andrews and Kyle MacDonnell, Television's First Lady, is another dirty crack at charmers of the cinema.

Follow "Broadway Love Song," "It'll Be All Right in a Hundred Years"—meaning "Touch and Go"?—and "Great Dane A-Comin'."

This last is a musical-comedy version of "Hamlet." Ambroise Thomas having made it into an opera, Sadlers' Wells having made it into a ballet, the Prince of Denmark isn't out of place in a song-and-dance show. Never so often, he's funny without being vulgar.

* * *

Audience Angels?

Intermission. Then "Wish Me Luck," a song-ballet with more than a touch of the Joos about it. And a shouting, shooting satire on the warriors of World War II who wrote their soon-to-be published memoirs under fire and fear of no men but Simon and Schuster.

And the inevitable "Santa Someone-or-Other" number with palm-trees, grass skirts, tom-toms and a humming chorus.

"Men of the Water-Mark" rings no morning bell in last night's memory. But "Mr. Brown, Miss Dupree" does. Not at all unhappily. Likewise "Miss Piatt Selects Mate." These remembered ones could stem from some Brooklyn Noel Coward. Or some poor man's Cole Porter!

Fronting for the "Touch and Go" finale, "Cinderella" is staged as if by Elia Kazan with a setting by Jo Mielziner.

It begins uproariously. It continues that way for some little time. Then it, too, weakens. So the entire company gets itself together, re-sings the songs you're requested to remember and takes a curtain call which surprises me with its spontaneity and volume. Audiences can be angels!

New York Post
HOME NEWS

OCTOBER 14, 1949

The Modest Merit Of a New Revue

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

If you come across any drama critic dancing in the streets in honor of "Touch and Go," it will not be this reviewer, but, nevertheless, the new revue by Jean and Walter Kerr and Jay Gorney, which George Abbott brought into the Broadhurst Theatre last night, is a pleasant, lively and good-looking show, with some admirable things about it. I am not likely to be found helping to unhitch the horses and pull the carriages of its leading players through the thoroughfares, either, yet the performers in the latest musical entertainment are likable and wholesome.

The virtues of "Touch and Go" are clear. It has good songs and at least one good satirical sketch, colorful and attractive settings and costumes, a proper pace, several conventional but effective ballet numbers, and a general air of good-natured raillery. It has a gay and pretty young dancer named Helen Gallagher, and, since I am not a critic who is above making such revelations, there is an exceptionally lovely young chorus girl with short blond hair, whose name I wish I could tell you. And there is a comedienne named Nancy Andrews, who is likely to be heard of again.

Sketches

The sketch which I admire particularly is a version of the story of Cinderella as, in the opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Kerr, it might have been staged by Elia Kazan after the fashion of "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Death of a Salesman." It isn't at all a gentle parody, but such burlesques shouldn't be, and it is funny and to the point, even to those of us who are enthusiasts for the work of the brilliant Mr. Kazan. On the other hand, a rather elaborate number showing how "Hamlet" might have been rewritten by Rodgers and Hammerstein didn't strike me as funny, despite the excellent idea of a Polonius who imitates Bobby Clark.

As in all self-respecting revues, there are a couple of Hollywood burlesques, and they are no doubt more comic to faithful movie followers than to those who are casual in their attendance on the cinema. A number in which caricatures of Olivia de Havilland in "The Snake Pit," Barbara Stanwyck in "Sorry, Wrong Number" and Jane Wyman in "Johnny Belinda" advise us that the way for an actress to be taken seriously in Hollywood is to look slovenly has its points, and I liked the idea of a skit in which it was suggested that trained apes tend to be smarter than screen beauties, even though it can down at the end.

The Songs

Mr. Gorney has proivded several songs that merit popularity. Included among them are pieces called "Mr. Brown, Miss Dupree," "American Primitive," "This Had Better Be Love" and "Wish Me Luck," and one about the lament of an unsuccessful candidate for matrimony. The last three numbers are sung with genuine comic skill by Miss Andrews. There is also a flattering number in which the names of the local drama critics are respectfully employed. It's a pretty good song, too. Some of the Kerr lyrics are excellent, although I doubt that "Lord love a duck" fits well into a song.

At least two of the sketches struck me as failing to come off. One makes fun of sentimental movies given to flashbacks and the other has to do with the writing craze among soldiers of the recent war. Both of them have good ideas that are not worked out with the proper success. But I should be mentioning some of the players I have omitted. Kyle MacDonnell is handsome and good-mannered in what is probably the leading role, Dick Sykes aids with the singing, Pearl Lang is a striking young dancer, and George Hall serves when a master of ceremonies is needed. They help a pretty good show.

The Sun

OCTOBER 14, 1949

'Touch and Go,' Revue Sponsored by George Abbott, Has Premiere at Broadhurst.

Over the years, George Abbott has had considerable success in giving Broadway some spirited musical shows in which the youthful zest of his players was a prominent factor in their appeal. Last night he tried it again as he sponsored "Touch and Go," a revue which had its premiere at the Broadhurst Theater. This time the old formula has let him down.

Presented originally last spring at Catholic University in Washington under the title "Thank You, Just Looking" this revue obviously seemed to offer in its campus presentation just the sort of material from which Mr. Abbott could fashion a gay and breezy Manhattan evening. On more professional 44th street it emerges as an uneven and slight bit of theatrical fare. The direction is credited solely to Walter Kerr, who with Jean Kerr wrote the sketches and lyrics. It might have been a better idea if Mr. Abbott had taken a hand there. There are some good numbers along the way, but not nearly enough of them, and the production has not been pulled together and pointed up as a top-notch revue should be. Setting out to satirize some of the current trends of the stage, the films, and popular literature, "Touch and Go" does manage to hit just the right note when Peggy Cass, Nancy Andrews and Kyle MacDonnell have some fun at the expense of Hollywood's Oscars as they delightfully sing the hilarious "Be a Mess" song for which the Kerrs, who are members of the Catholic University faculty, have written some bright lyrics.

There are some genuine chuckles too in the skit about an animal film, and the Kerrs' version of "Hamlet" as Rodgers and Hammerstein might adapt it has its points. In most of the others, however, their spoofing is too often heavy handed. George Hall contributes a nice droll touch in the skits but he isn't given enough to do.

Jay Gorney's music is pleasant but contains nothing outstanding. Miss Andrews manages to stop the proceedings near the close as she warbles engagingly about how "Miss Platt Selects a Mate" but it is her mugging and the lyrics rather than the melody which put it over.

"Touch and Go" is short on the fast paced hoofing for which Mr. Abbott's shows have been noted and it's a definite lack. Of the ballets the "Under the Sleeping Volcano" number is the best. Pearl Lang, Daniel Nagrin and David Lober are excellent here, and they get a tremendous assist from Peggy Clark's skillful lighting.

This new revue in its material and its hard working young cast invites comparison with last season's holdover hit, "Lend an Ear." They do it far better next door.

HERRICK BROWN

"The Browning Version" and "A Harlequinade"

The Sun

OCTOBER 13, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Return of a Fine Actor.

Maurice Evans, that resourceful actor-manager, brightened the somber new season last night with the presentation at the Coronet of "The Browning Version" and "Harlequinade," plays by Terence Rattigan, a dramatist now at the top of his class in London's West End. Not particularly notable, these new Rattigan pieces, but they're turned into good theater by showmanship and some superior performances.

Evans, forswearing Shaw and Shakespeare for the moment, and going along on the theory that an actor must keep acting, creates two characters, one of them a sick, aging and defeated schoolmaster, and the other a braying and hammy actor, with great adroitness, and he is fortunate in having the accomplished Edna Best as his leading woman. It's a fine team.

"The Browning Version" is a sharp and bitter play, done without an intermission, and it runs for a little more than an hour. The somewhat shorter "Harlequinade," an amusing behind-the-scenes comedy, and one that sags and drags a bit, provides a romp for the evenings stars. It follows "The Browning Version" on the double bill.

In "The Browning Version" Playwright Rattigan presents a study of Andrew Crocker-Harris, a brilliant classical scholar, who has made a failure of his teaching career. "The Crock," as he is derisively called by his students, is a crushed and beaten little man—precise, exact and conscientious to the point of being inflexible in his discipline, and he has come to be known as "the Himmler of lower Fifth." Illness forces his retirement before he is eligible for a pension and his loss of it brings further taunts from a nagging and flagrantly unfaithful wife. When she gives a revelation of her supreme viciousness, her unwilling lover finally walks out on her and she and her futile, schoolmaster husband sit down to a bleak supper. Their loathing for each other is apparent in every utterance.

Maurice Evans makes a genuine character of the graying, decaying and frustrated Andrew Crocker-Harris, a pitiful figure, whose life has been one of unfulfillment, and Edna Best brings uncommon skill to her playing as the whining and scampish wife. Louis Hector is very good indeed as a hypocritical and expansive headmaster. Peter Scott-Smith is first rate as an ambitious but none too brilliant student, Ron Randell turns in a vigorous performance as the lover of Millie Crocker-Harris, and Frederick Bradlee is particularly winning as a young schoolmaster.

"Harlequinade" is Terence Rattigan's fable of a man-and-wife acting team, the Lunt & Fontanne of the British Isles, energetically trouping the midlands in Shakespearean repertoire. The maturing male member is engaged with the verse of an ardent and impetuous Romeo when he is told that he has become a grandfather. Equally jolting is the news that he is also a bigamist. But the Gosports are not too upset by such trifles. The show must go on—and it does. There is genuine humor in the playing of Evans as the great Gosport and in the characterization of Miss Best as his Juliet.

Bertha Belmore is briskly entertaining as a battered and outspoken character actress and

"THE BROWNING VERSION" AND "A HARLEQUINADE"

Plays by Terence Rattigan; staged by Peter Glenville; settings by Frederick Stover; costumes by David Ffolkes; presented by Maurice Evans, in association with Stephen Mitchell at the Coronet Theatre, October 12, 1949. The casts:

"The Browning Version"

John Taplow..Peter Scott-Smith
Frank Hunter.....Ron Randell
Millie Crocker-Harris.....
Edna Best
Andrew Crocker-Harris.....
Maurice Evans
Dr. Frobisher....Louis Hector
Peter Gilbert..Frederick Bradlee
Mrs. Gilbert....Patricia Wheel

"A Harlequinade"

Arthur Gosport..Maurice Evans
Edna Selby.....Edna Best
Johnny.....Bertram Tanswell
Dame Maud Gosport.....
Bertha Belmore
Jack Wakefield....Ron Randell
George Chudleigh..Harry Sothern
First Halberdier.....
Peter Scott-Smith
Second Halberdier.....
Tom Hughes Sand
Miss Fishlock..Olive Blakeney
Fred Ingram..Frederick Bradlee
Muriel Palmer.....Eileen Page
Tom Palmer.....Peter Martyn
Mr. Burton.....Louis Hector
Joyce Langland..Patricia Wheel

there's good work from Ron Randell, Peter Scott-Smith, Olive Blakeney, Eileen Page, Patricia Wheel and Louis Hector, in the role of a blustering house manager. The costumes of David Ffolkes are extraordinarily good, as are the settings of Frederick Stover.

Not earth-shaking, these two Rattigan plays, but they contain good writing; they are well staged and expertly played, and Broadway should be grateful for them. And to Maurice Evans for bringing them over, and showing us once more what a fine actor he really is.

New York Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 13, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Evans + Best—Perfection

MAURICE EVANS has brought a new play of power and distinction to the Coronet Theater to give needed impetus to the season. Terence Rattigan's "The Browning Version," in which he stars with Edna Best, is a savage and moving tragedy of frustration and hatred. Appearing here for the first time in modern clothes, Evans modulates his portrayal of a desiccated schoolmaster immaculately, while Miss Best is superbly shrewish as a faithless wife. They lavish the finest sort of acting on a work which is grim, but speaks clearly to the heart. It is only odd to have it followed by Rattigan's amusing and voluble farce, "A Harlequinade," which might better have been cut down to a curtain-raiser. In any case the double bill is a bright token for coming stage doings.

* * *

"The Browning Version" is honest and eloquent. The author, who will be gratefully remembered for "The Winslow Boy," has moved so surely toward his climax that it contains a variety of the magical overtones which first-rate theater can set up. Dealing with one terrible day in the life of fifth-form teacher in a private school who loses his self-respect, his health, a pension and his wife, while denying one act of devotion and kindness, he has composed a drama of far more depth and consequence than the subject might imply. Lines and situations dove-tail brilliantly. Under the direction of Peter Grenville, who staged the London presentation, it should most certainly duplicate that success.

* * *

The performances of Evans and Miss Best are beautifully matched. His is, of course, the focal role, as he stubbornly faces up to one humiliation after another, only to break down when a youngster gives him a copy of Robert Browning's translation of Aeschylus's "Agamemnon." He makes it that. With quiet intensity he creates a full-length portrait of old Crocker-Harris. Desperation is coupled with pride and a curious sympathy in his revealing characterization. Miss Best, who has been too long absent from the stage, is utterly convincing as the nagging woman who flaunts her affair with a younger master, but cannot kill what she has already destroyed. The gifted actress has never been more knowing. She is at once venomous and pitiful, as she looses all the hatred that once was love on her pedantic husband.

* * *

They have excellent support. Peter Scott-Smith is tremendously appealing as the fifth-former who likes old Crock in spite of his tyrannical discipline and unfunny attempts at jesting. As the lover who is shocked out of an affair by sheer revulsion, Ron Randell contributes a note of steady normalcy to the tragedy which holds it in delicate balance, while Louis Hector is correctly pompous as the headmaster. "The Browning Version" is a work of inspired craftsmanship.

* * *

"A Harlequinade" switches the mood at the Coronet abruptly. The afterpiece makes merry with an acting couple, rehearsing "Romeo and Juliet" in the provinces. The balcony scene is constantly being interrupted by explosions of temperament and a daughter whom the star did not know existed. Evans is as comically assured in the farce as he is somberly commanding in "The Browning Version." Miss Best is delightful as his leading lady and Bertha Belmore and Scott-Smith contribute to the gaiety. The performances are far more important than a slight and overwritten comedy. It still cannot dim the authority of "The Browning Version."

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 13, 1949

Maurice Evans' Fans Get a Double Value

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

In the billing of two moderately short plays under the title "The Browning Version," at the Coronet Theater, Maurice Evans has, more than anything else, a certain novelty, or curiosity value, to sell.

The star has built his public shrewdly, appealing to its better instincts and never short changing it. For some time he has expressed a wish to appear in some modern work. In "The Browning Version" and "Harlequinade" he has arrived at a sort of compromise.

Ascribed to the present, the plays have no qualities which identify them strictly with our day, any more than many others. But they are done with spirit, and they have contrast and brevity, two not overly familiar characteristics of many theater evenings.

A Pair of Etudes.

It is unlikely that the Evans books will list any new records with this presentation, just as it is likely that it will be happily supported by the star's public.

What Terence Rattigan has writtn actually is a pair of etudes. In the first, whose title refers to Robert Browning's translation of "Agamemnon" by Aeschylus, a humorless failure of a school teacher is so touched by a student's farewell gift, that he finds the courage to stand up against his faithless shrew of a wife. We leave him assured at least of a future of passive calm.

For years English playwrights have stood with fingers in their ears and eyes popped with shock at the horrors they have summoned up to dramatize from their own school days. The results are inclined to be morbid without seeming very general.

Troubles Pile Up.

Rattigan's short drama is no exception, its virtue being that it offers the light makings of two character sketches most skillfully projected by Evans and Miss Edna Best.

The second play "Harlequinade," is milder but a great deal more fun. It is an excerpt from a Shakespeare rehearsal by a typical touring ham. The stubbornly youthful leading man discovers all at once that he is a grandfather and a bigamist, and has an illegitimate child.

With magnificent distraction he proceeds to put "Romeo and Juliet" together, while only occasionally pondering over the strange dynasty he has begun. There is a mad and ancient Dame in his theatrical as well as his personal family, and his current wife is as stage struck as he is.

This is a comedy of situation, fast and straightforward, and markedly lacking in witty peaks that might have made it truly sparkling and memorable.

Evans is utterly theatrical, wildly absent minded and intense. Even in stiller moments, he exudes energy that keeps the whole situation lusty.

Creates Hateful Woman.

Here, as in the first play, we admired Miss Best deeply for what she does not do. With a minimum of mannerism and no smirking, she managed to create a heartily hateful woman with a deceptively bland facade, in "The Browning Version." The broad comedy of the second item she treats with similar simplicity. In her portrayal it is the instinct for affectation which counts. Minor airs are unnecessary and mercifully neglected, and the result is strong and clear.

The rest of the cast has scrap bag opportunities which it manages with aplomb. Bertha Belmore is Dame Maud, and plays with imposing displacement in a grand manner that makes lines sound funnier than they are. Peter Scott-Smith is first rate as the mocking donor of the first play, and makes his Cockney outbursts in the second pay off.

Ron Randell is pleasant as the more normal character in each play, and Patricia Wheel, Louis Hector and Frederick Bradlee add helpful touches to the contrasting works.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 13, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Being one the theatre's ablest craftsmen, Maurice Evans has taken hold of one effective play and given it an excellent performance. It is "The Browning Version" by Terence Rattigan, author of "The Winslow Boy" and "O Mistress Mine"; and it opened a new season for the Coronet last evening. Since it is a long one-act play, Mr. Rattigan and Mr. Evans complete the evening with a brief piece of heavy-handed horseplay dubbed "A Harlequinade" and acted with all the skill of an amateur theatre society. On balance, this is one of Mr. Evans' mild evenings, not to be compared with the brilliant "Man and Superman" of two seasons ago.

* * *

"The Browning Version" is the character sketch of an unloved English schoolmaster who is concluding eighteen years of failure by leaving his old post. Since Mr. Rattigan is a superior writer, this dour portrait of a friendless pedagogue, betrayed by his wife, discarded by the headmaster and disliked by the boys, is good theatre, cruel, pathetic and sentimental. Going straight to the heart of the character, Mr. Rattigan wastes no time on the amenities and says good-by to a mournful Mr. Chips with skill and dignity.

Since the play works in terms of the theatre with a first-rate cast headed by Mr. Evans, opinion is likely to split over the quality of the material. Is it a fine character portrait or only superior hack-work? This column is choosing the less worthy side of the argument. Although Mr. Rattigan's broken schoolmaster is a pathetic spectacle, he is in point of fact a crotchety, inferior old man without much to recommend him except his helplessness.

* * *

Mr. Rattigan seems to believe that he is the victim of the natural barbarism of small schoolboys and the malignance of his wife; and it is possible that Mr. Rattigan perceives a kind of wistful nobility in the old fellow's genteel rebellion at the end. But to this column "The Browning Version" seems clever rather than genuine—Pinero watered down for modern taste.

Let's not argue about the performance. Under Peter Glenville's workmanlike direction, it is superior theatre—a nice balance of tones, a skillful blending of characters, a somber evocation of mood. As the haggard, withered schoolmaster, Mr. Evans plays with a melancholy reserve that avoids the maudlin and preserves the pride and dignity. Edna Best, returning to New York after an absence of seven years, plays the slatternly, revengeful wife with the awareness of a superior actress.

Ron Randell is also particularly good as the wife's somewhat reluctant lover—a curious part, incidentally, toward the close when Mr. Rattigan is anxiously tying up several loose ends. As the gravely patronizing headmaster, Louis Hector gives one of his best performances that suggests without insisting on the headmaster's insincerity. There is a charming portrait of a gangling but well-bred schoolboy by Peter Scott-Smith. As the young couple that is taking over the schoolmaster's house, Patricia Wheel and Frederick Bradlee play brief parts with taste and attractive good-will. Frederick Stover and David Ffolkes have provided suitable settings and costumes, respectively.

* * *

"A Harlequinade" is a rowdy sketch about some ham actors putting on Shakespearean repertory and interpreting all the crises of their lives in terms of gaudy theatre. This is one of the theatre's most ancient wheezes. Although Mr. Rattigan is an expert writer in the polite style, slapstick and low comedy hardly become him, his sense of humor not being hearty enough. Nor are Mr. Evans and his associates any heartier. As writing and as acting, "A Harlequinade" is a pretty embarrassing escapade.

No, this is not one of Mr. Evans' happiest occasions.

Journal-American

OCTOBER 13, 1949

Dual Offering Makes An Up-and-Downy Bill

By ROBERT GARLAND

With Maurice Evans' showing up at the Coronet, the New York theatre season of 1949-1950 has genuinely begun. Last night, in the presence of a smart but well-mannered audience, Mr. Evans returned triumphantly to town. With him came Edna Best. And two long-short plays by Terence Rattigan.

Produced successfully a year ago in London as "Playbill," these two long-short plays are "The Browning Version" and "Harlequinade." The first is a tragedy. The second is a farce.

Over here, at the Coronet, Mr. Evans assumes the roles which over there, at the Phoenix, were assumed by Eric Portman. In the tragedy, which opens the double bill, he is Andrew Crocker-Harris, a master in a private school in England. In the farce, which follows, he is an aging romantic actor.

In both he is Maurice Evans in his very finest form. The tragedy, "The Browning Version," sustains him to the end. The farce, "Harlequinade," gradually lets him down.

Paired and packaged, they make a beautiful, but unbalanced, evening in the theatre. And if "The Browning Version" is a finer tragedy than "Harlequinade" is a farce, the shortcoming is in no manner of thinking Mr. Evans', Terence Rattigan, usually an up-and-downy playwright, is up-and-downy here.

* * *

A Masterpiece

A three-dimensional exposure of the bitterest frustration, "The Browning Version" is, I think, a masterpiece. A long-short character study, really, its Andrew Crocker-Harris dominates its scenes. His wife, Millie Crocker-Harris, and the man she craves, Frank Hunter, are, following their fashions, symbols.

Playwright Rattigan, having set up Mr. Crocker-Harris in his South-of-England sitting-room for the audience to see, Mrs. Crocker-Harris enters with the will to knock him down.

This is her avocation. This and her uncasual get-togethers with Frank Hunter. As Andrew Crocker-Harris' younger, less inhibited fellow member of the faculty, Mr. Hunter has found Millie Crocker-Harris a handy and not too externally forbidding outlet for his all-too-humanity.

The climax is an anti-climax. But, as Mr. Crocker-Harris says to Head Master Dr. Frobisher over the telephone, "occasionally an anti-climax can be surprisingly effective."

Although basically miscast, Edna Best makes no little of Millie Crocker-Harris, the British broomstick-rider. Also recommended are Ron Randell as Frank Hunter, Peter Scott-Smith as John Taplow and Louis Hector as Head Master Dr. Frobisher. From the inside out, Maurice Evans is Andrew Crocker-Harris. And superb!

* * *

It Runs Down

Beginning, like a roller-coaster, at its highest point, "Harlequinade" runs down. In the opening situation, the acting Gosports—I'm almost tempted to suggest that if you don't like them you can Lunt them—are dress-rehearsing the balcony scene out of "Romeo and Juliet."

In an effort to lend youthfulness to his mature member of the house of Montague, Arthur Gosport indulges in a "little jump" onto a garden stool.

"Thou art thyself, though, not a Montague," says his big girl Juliet, "and are you going to do that 'little jump' tonight?" It is then the farce gets going. For a while, it possesses the needed semblence of spontaneity. Then, with the arrival of secondary plots and characters, the effect of freshness wanes.

In the American text, Tallulah Bankhead in "She Stoops to Conquer" is a Gladys Cooper substitute. And the Gosport grandson now looks like Edward G. Robinson. And——

Mr. Evans and Miss Best, Ron Randell and Bertha Belmore, give their everything to keep the slapstick slapping. But it's the earlier "Browning Version" you fondly cling to. I wish they'd play it last. In my mind's treasure chest, I'd like to keep it and Maurice Evans' performance topmost. These indeed, are priceless!

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 13, 1949

Maurice Evans Acts Two Trifles

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Just as the clown yearns to play Hamlet, so does Hamlet have the urge to do something funnier—and easier. So we have Maurice Evans, who has played Napoleon, several Shakespearean kings and a Bernard Shaw mouthpiece, offering a couple of trifles at the Coronet Theatre last evening.

The trifles are two one-actors by Terence Rattigan, "The Browning Version" and "Harlequinade." They are, no doubt, a nice change of pace for the conscientious Mr. Evans, and they offer pleasing glimpses of the long-absent Edna Best; but they are not very solid theatrical fare.

Schoolmasters Again.

"The Browning Version" is about a subject which has an incomprehensible fascination for British playwrights—the schoolmaster. In the Rattigan version, the schoolmaster (Mr. Evans) is a noble, embittered old coot who has heart attacks and a cheating wife (Miss Best). He survives both. He teaches Greek, and breaks into tears when a young student (a boy, for only boys go to school in British plays about schools) gives him a farewell present of a copy of Browning's version of Aeschylus' "Agamemnon."

About the only dialog I can remember from this playlet is where one character inquires, "Where have you bean the last week?" and the other says "Rully, I've bean appallingly busy." But, on the other hand, "The Browning Version" won the Ellen Terry Award as the best play in London last season.

Backstage Comedy

The second playlet, "Harlequinade," is somewhat gayer, but no more than somewhat. In it Mr. Evans and Miss Best are married stars who are rehearsing "Romeo and Juliet." As a stage manager explains in this backstage comedy, the noted Mister and Missus of the drama prefer plays which make them lover and mistress, because it is so comforting to audiences to know that in real life they are happily married. There are several references in the play to the Lunts, who were in Mr. Rattigan's "O, Mistress Mine."

Bertha Belmore, Peter Scott-Smith, Louis Hector, Harry Sothern and others fill in a pleasant company and help to stretch out a mild and inoffensive evening. But, just for the hell of it, I'd like to see some American theatre pretty soon—say a revival of "Dead End" or "The Last Mile."

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 13, 1949

Maurice Evans Triumphs In 2 Rattigan Plays

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Maurice Evans, in association with Stephen Mitchell, brought Terence Rattigan's two long one-act plays, "The Browning Version" and "A Harlequinade" to the Coronet Theatre last evening, and made play-going wonderful, indeed. The former is a tragedy, the latter a satiric farce. They complement one another beautifully.

In "The Browning Version," Evans plays his first modern role, sans costume, in New York. Heretofore, he has confined himself to costume plays and classics. Yes, we include Shaw's "Man and Superman" in the latter category. In the current instance, Evans is portraying the heartbreak of an English schoolmaster betrayed by his cynical wife and laughed at by his pupils.

He wants so much to be popular with his students and he doesn't know-how. Forced to retire by illness, he is refused a pension, but is made happy when one of his pupils brings him the Browning translation of a Greek drama, inscribed with a personal tribute. For the first time the stern, disciplined teacher shows his feelings. He is proud of the gift until his callous wife suggests that it was but a means to win a passing mark for the donor.

Evans is magnificient as the schoolmaster. Acting with notable restraint and tremendous heart and effect, he puts a lump in your throat.

Edna Best, co-starring with Evans in the double bill, is excellent as the flinty, frustrated, cruel wife.

There are also outstanding performances by Peter Scott-Smith as the young student, Ron Randell as a compassionate science teacher and Louis Hector as a pompous, glib-tongued headmaster. Frederick Bradlee and Patricia Wheel are eminently right for other roles.

Evans has a chance to return to costume and let his remarkable vocal powers out to full pitch in "A Harlequinade," which brings the evening to a happy close. Here, Evans and Miss Best impersonate a pair of hammy Shakespeareans bringing culture to the provinces on a British Labor Government subsidy.

Judging by Rattigan's acidulous satire, subsidized theatre is not all that some here think it to be.

Salutes must go to Peter Glenville's versatile direction, Frederick Stover's sets and David Ffolkes' costumes.

What would the American theatre be without Evans? Season after season, this gifted Englishman, who now honors American citizenship, has given us acting and theatre of consistent merit. He has done nothing cheap or vulgar. He has maintained a high standard and the current double bill at the Coronet is not the least of his achievements. It offers a vastly rewarding evening in the theatre.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

OCTOBER 13, 1949

Mr. Evans Provides Good Double Bill

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Turning for the first time in his American career from the past to the modern drama, Maurice Evans continued his unbroken chain of successes by appearing in two plays by Terence Rattigan at the Coronet Theatre last night, and a good theatrical time was had by all. Neither the serious item on the bill, "The Browning Version," nor the comedy number, "Harlequinade," is a work of the first importance, but both of them are highly effective vehicles for good acting, and that is certainly what Mr. Evans and his associates give them. The result is an extremely pleasant evening in the drama.

Although, as I say, the two plays are not outstanding masterpieces, it would be a mistake to dismiss "The Browning Version" as merely a star's vehicle. Unquestionably, it is that, too, but it is also a striking, thoughtful and sympathetic study of an arid and beaten schoolmaster, who has reached the end of his academic career a failure. Poor old Crocker-Harris, whose wife is a faithless shrew, whose pupils mock him and whose colleagues look upon him with lofty scorn, is a believable and touching human being, drawn with insight, compassion and not too much sentimentality.

Mr. Chips

The Mr. Chips type of character is, of course, one of the regulation figures of the British stage and screen, and it has been drawn so frequently and with so many minor variations that it might seem too familiar for comfort any longer. It is all the more to the credit of Mr. Rattigan, therefore, that he has given the teacher so much freshness and individuality and made him, in his desiccated way, so appealing. The author has likewise made his turning-worm story dramatically credible and effective, and, by writing it in one act, has stripped it of unnecessary verbiage. "The Browning Version" is minor drama, but, within its limits, an excellent one.

"Harlequinade"—the program seems uncertain as to whether it is "Harlequinade" or "A Harle-

quinade"—is a very different type of work. A gay and riotous improvisation based upon the arguable theory that stage people are mad egoists, but lovable, it is a charade, rather than a play, and it has a tendency to run down upon occasion, but, on the whole, it is good, rowdy fun. The tale of a celebrated acting couple, rehearsing "Romeo and Juliet" in an English Midlands town, it seems made up as it goes along, but that adds to its informal spirit of hilarity. Like "The Browning Version," it is perfectly acted.

Mr. Evans

If the two plays represent an increasingly interesting British playwright in good, sound form, they provide a genuine triumph for Mr. Evans. Both his hapless wreck of a schoolmaster and his burlesqued Shakespearean actor are brilliantly done and a perfect answer to his few critics. To those who have thought of him as a mere elocutionist, his authentically moving portrayal of a doomed man must prove a revelation, while his satirical picture of a ham will answer those who, forgetting his brilliance as Falstaff and Malvolio, had doubted his skill at farce comedy.

The evening also provides something of a return triumph for the long-absent Edna Best, who is fine as both the pedagogue's wife and the Shakespearean actress. In "The Browning Version," in particular, her ability to present the shrewish nastiness of a disagreeable woman, without sacrificing anything of the wife's credibility as a human being, is noteworthy acting. There are superior performances, too, in "The Browning Version" by Ron Randell and Louis Hector and, in "Harlequinade," by Bertha Belmore and Patricia Wheel. But then every performance adds to the interest of the evening.

"The Pirates of Penzance"

S. M. Chartock is presenting a series of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Except for the initial presentation space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each presentation.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 11, 1949

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Not a Happy One

ONE of the gayest of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta's "The Pirates of Penzance," is being given a pedestrian performance at the Mark Hellinger Theater. This second revival in S. M. Chartock's Savoy season has occasional moments of enchantment. "Poor Wandering One" remains one of Sullivan's most felicitous compositions, even when it is sung indifferently. Joseph Macauley gives a staunch account of himself as the pirate commander, realizing much of the wit and satire in a fabulous libretto. And the number which inspired "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here" is afforded a resounding choral delivery.

What is wanting in the production is style, pace and vocal proficiency. Kathleen Roche, who has appeared here more than once before as the most beautiful of General Stanley's daughters, is vivacious, but her singing of the chief arias and duets is on the shrill side. Ralph Riggs cuts all sorts of capers as the major general with a brood of wards in chancery. Unfortunately he brings so little comic inflection to the part that his recital of requirements for military fame is dull, while his skipping through a ruined chapel in a nightshirt is downright embarrassing.

* * *

The Frederic of Morton Bowe is in the better tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan revivals. He has a pleasing voice and he wisely underplays the part of the pirate's apprentice, who leaves his associates on his twenty-first year only to find out that he was born on leap year and is therefore only five. Assisting him in making the best of a clumsy exhibit is Earle MacVeigh, playing the part of the pirate king's lieutenant with zest and persuasion. Jean Handzlik has the role of Ruth, the piratical maid of all work and she handles it in what can only be called a routine fashion.

* * *

One of the chief disappointments of the new offering of an old favorite is the execution of the celebrated "A Policeman's Lot is Not a Happy One". Robert Eckles grimaces all over the stage as the sergeant who has been commissioned to lead a squad of bobbies against the pirates ,but the song is lost in ponderous pantomime. The orchestra, under Lehman Engel's direction, does better by Sullivan than the company. It is not the fault of the musicians that there is a considerable difference of opinion between them and the vocalists. "The Pirates of Penzance" is eminently worthy of revival, but it should have been served better than it is at the Mark Hellinger.

"THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE"

Opera written by W. S. Gilbert; composed by Arthur Sullivan; staged by S. M. Chartock; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Peggy Morrison; musical direction by Lehman Engel; presented by Mr. Chartock at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, October 10, 1949. The cast:

Samuel.....Earle MacVeigh
Frederic.....Morton Bowe
Ruth.....Jean Handzlik
Richard.....Joseph Macaulay
Kate.....Beverly Janis
Edith.....Elaine Malbin
Isabel.....Marie Petek
Mabel.....Kathleen Roche
Major-General Stanley.....Ralph Riggs
Edward.....Robert Eckles

Journal American

OCTOBER 11, 1949

A Zestful, Appropriate Revival of the Satire

By ROBERT GARLAND

At the Hellinger, Mr. Chartock's new American Savoyards have entered their second week of Gilbert and Sullivan with a spirited doing-over of "The Pirates of Penzance." The singing actors are those of "The Mikado." Lehman Engel remains happily on the podium.

Still taking stock in neither the sacredness of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaborations nor the infallibility of the D'Oyly Carte interpretations, I find these U.S.A. revivalists satisfactory. Is not their excellent "Pirates" better than their good "Mikado"?

And Ralph Riggs, after leaning on Martin Green as Ko-Ko, is on his excellent own as the Major General who, in one of the most unsingable of the patter songs, knows the kings of England and can quote the fights historical from Marathon to Waterloo in order categorical.

Even so, this week's medal is pinned on the chesty uniform of Robert Eckles' Sergeant. His "When a Felon's Not Engaging in His Enjoyment" is a rare rendition. Were it not for Mr. Engel's baton, Mr. Eckles would be with it yet!

* * *

More American

This week's collaboration is more America's than any of the Gilbert and Sullivan masterworks. For "The Pirates of Penzance" had its world premiere in New York's Fifth Avenue on the final day of 1879. London waited until the following April.

International copyrights being what they weren't in Queen Victoria's day, librettist and composer came across to protect their American copyrights. The only way to protect them was to stage the work ahead of some enterprising Yankee. They did!

"The Pirates" was successful. I see by the papers that the baker, the broker and their ladies were carried away by the words and music, that the office boy and his